

Basil Chulev

## **Jovan Dragašević revisited – „Geography for Middle Schools“ Belgrade, 1871**





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A genuine historical testimony of Macedonia before the big geopolitical reshuffle in 1878

*„Every nation that has glorious deeds is a glorious nation. However, beside all the glorious deeds, if those deeds remain unknown, the nation shall also remain unknown. Therefore it is necessary to collect and preserve all those glorious deeds in history, because history is the guardian of a nation's life, and so future generations shall know, respect, accept and support it...“*

Jovan Dragašević.<sup>1</sup>

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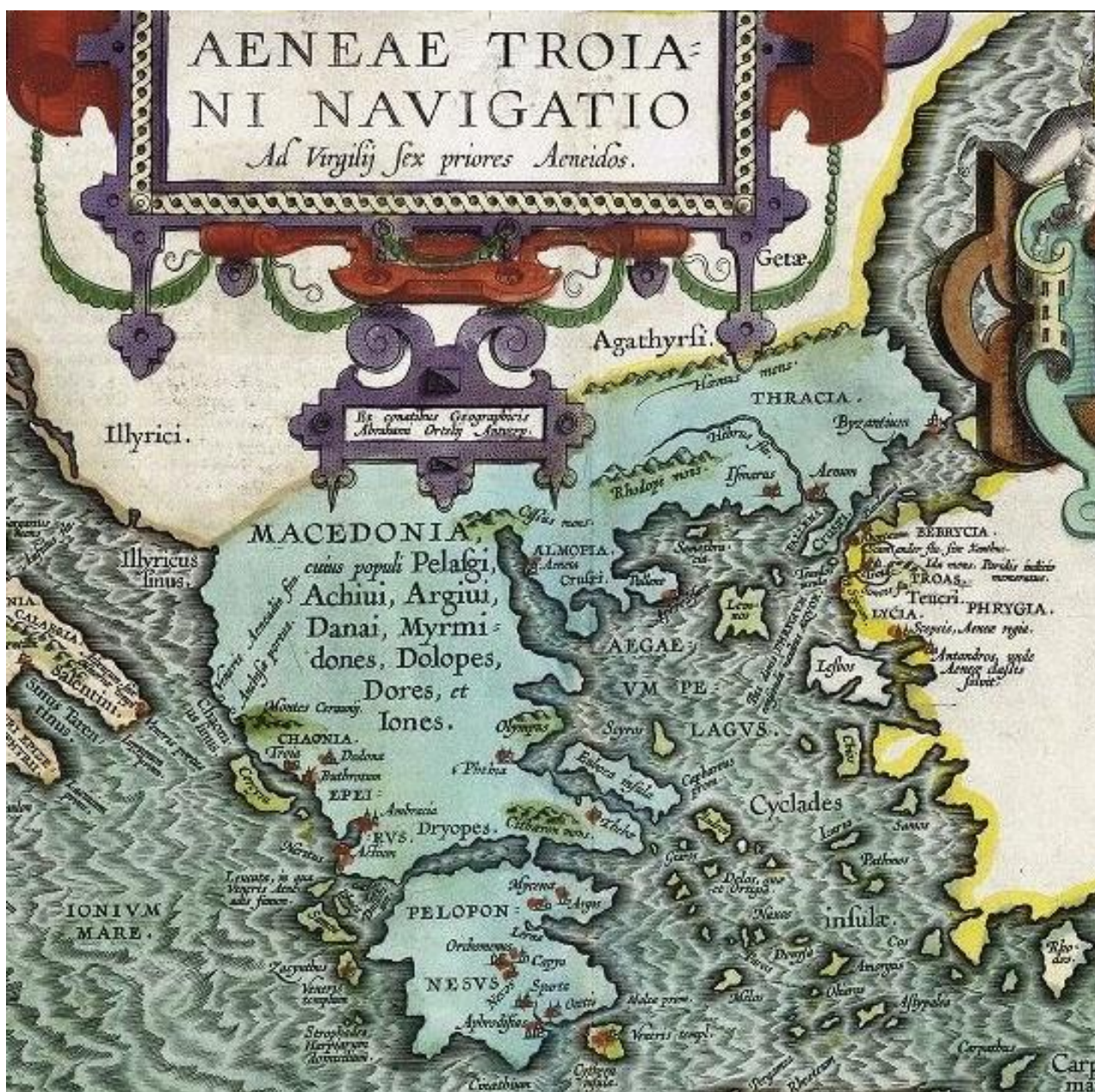
<sup>1</sup> From the *History* page of the Military Archive website of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Defence.



## 1. Introduction

The above sentence is a very illustrative example from the writings of Jovan Dragašević, and show us his 1866 suggestion in establishing the History department in the Military Ministry of the then Principality of Serbistan (*Serbia*) in the Ottoman empire. This was his life conviction and dedication, ... at least until the Balkan Wars. Later, because of the change of geopolitical situation and radical change in the politic and foreign affairs of the new Serbian state and government – his studies were biased too, and his previous objective and summary works of the Southeastern European peninsula were also modified. According with the new situation on the battle fields of the Illyrian Troad (the older name of the *Balkans*, used by him and his predecessors) the studies written before the Balkan Wars were neglected and censored, and new ones that matched the 19th century new frontlines, and the politics of the day, were written.

But, the exemplars of these not so much older and unbiased publications, are to be found in many private and public archives and collections, and they cannot be ignored. One of these, precious for the historical revision publications, was issued in 1871 in Belgrade, where Dragašević published one of his most complete and precious books – a workbook for middle schools entitled "*Geography for Middle Schools*". In this book Dragašević describes in great detail and most specifically the history and ethnic borders of the Illyrian Troad (*Macedonian peninsula, Southeastern peninsula*, later renamed as *Balkans*), including the ethno-cultural and linguistic characteristics of the local populations in 19th century. This book cannot be found neither on the History shelves of the Military Archive of the Republic of Serbia, nor anywhere else in the modern libraries and other official sources. All works and studies previous to the Balkan Wars are intentionally erased and obscured, and new history was written. A completely new world was born after the Balkan (1912-1913) and World War I (1914-1918). But, one of these innocent looking but genuine workbooks was recently found in a private collection in Republic of Macedonia, and was digitized, thus rediscovering once again to the scholars and world academia the *Gran Picture* of the pre-war *Illyrian Troad*, i.e. Macedonian Peninsula (or '*Balkans*').

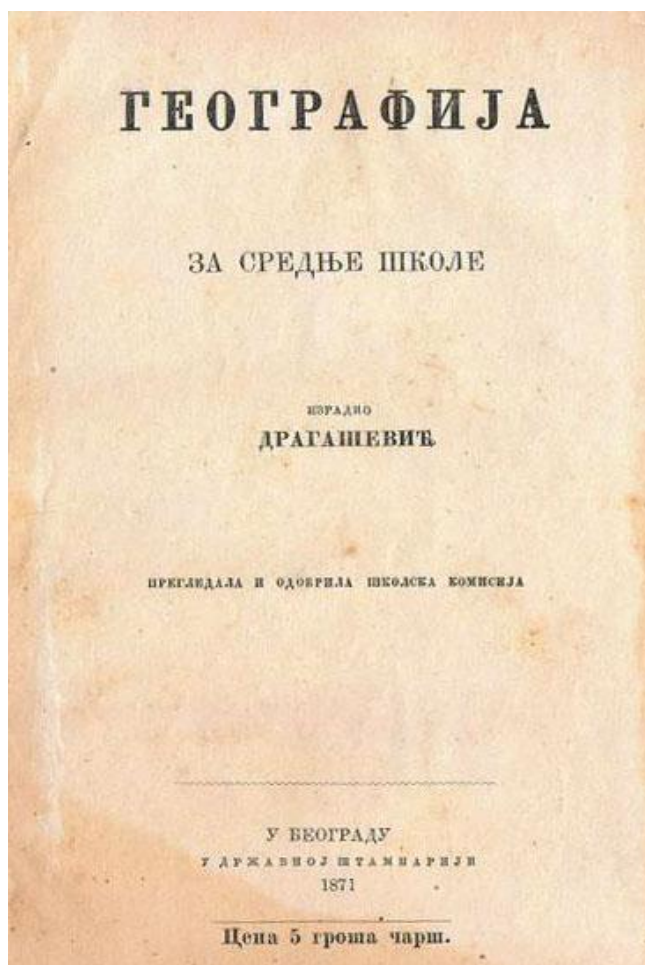


Macedonia/Macedonian Peninsula was the common nomination of our corner of the world, before the Berlin Congress in 1878, when the great powers finally felt strong enough to change the history and to reshape the millennia-old frontiers, in accordance with their new needs for profit. In 1871 Jovan Dragashević was still a genuine scholar, uncontaminated by the new nations mounted policies of the 19th century. Below are some pages from his Geography book, which discover the differences between the old (Ancient History Model), and more recent (19th century "Aryan Model") fabricated history of the Macedonian Peninsula (i.e. *Balkans*). These pages throw more light, especially on the Macedonian question and the cultural heritage as it was, before the *Balkan Wars*, preserved for the world history by the hand of Jovan Dragashević.

## 2. „Geography for Middle Schools“, Belgrad 1871

A workbook for middle schools, which recently resurfaced from a private collection in Macedonia, was scanned and digitized, thus offering us a glimpse in the pre-first-world-war 19th century world history, before the latest (quasi „Aryan“) shift produced by the imperialistic Western Europe and Russia. This was the common knowledge that was transcended to the students in the schools, before the map and the new Balkan nations (except biblical Macedonia) were re-drawn once again in the 19th century, and before the greater interests of the world powers shaped today's modern world through the ultimate wars, destruction and blasphemy.

Right: The first page from the Dragašević's „*GEOGRAPHY for Middle Schools*“, Belgrade state-typography, 1871.

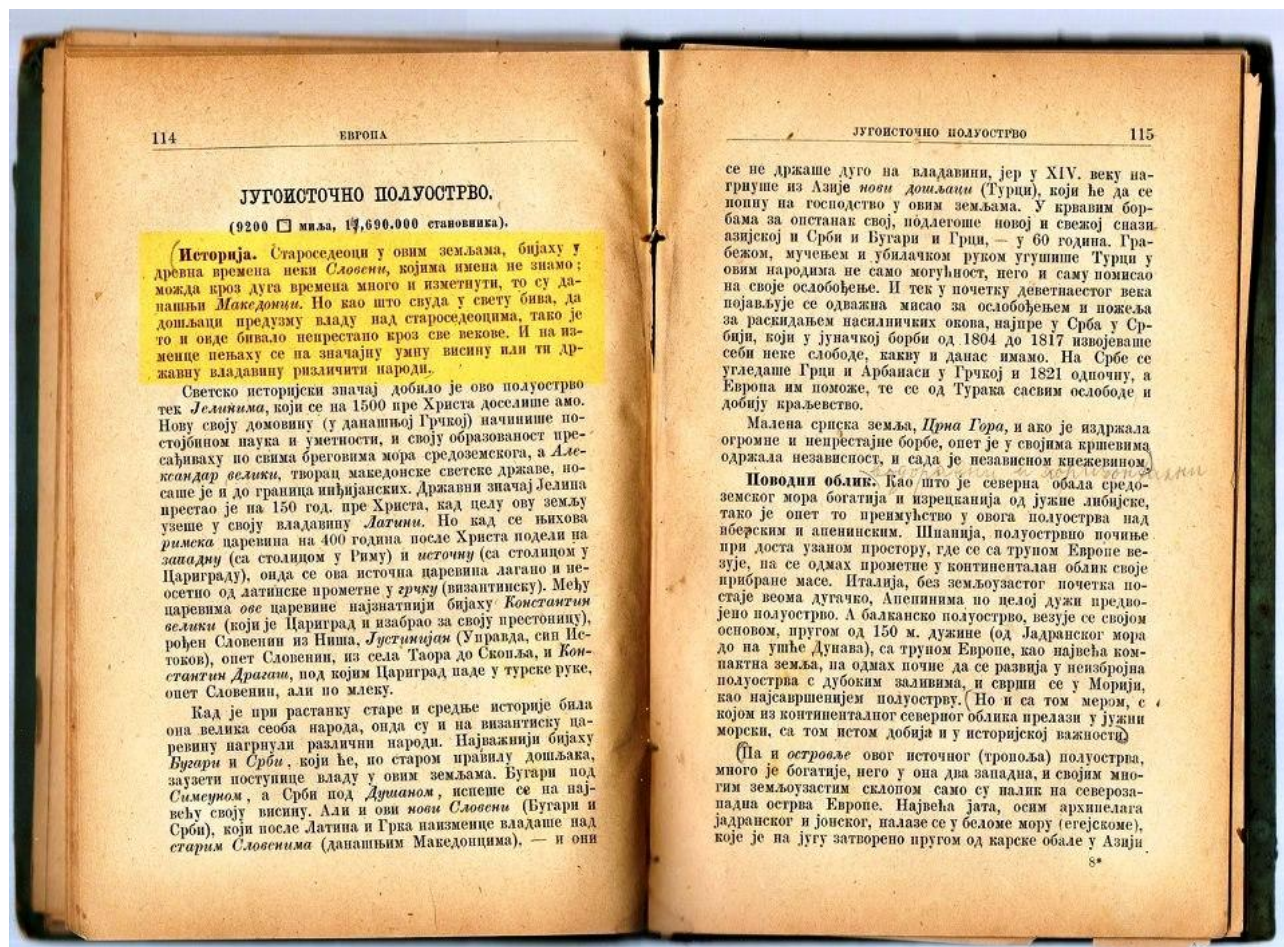


Dragašević narration is focused, with clear and eloquent language and style. The historical pretext given by Dragašević, which is of interest to this retrospective, begins with the description of the native autochthonous inhabitants of the Southeastern European peninsula (*Balkans*). This is given in a brief historical description of these lands on the pages 114 and 115, from prehistoric times until the modern era. The chapter which is of our interest, "SOUTHEASTERN PENINSULA", begins with the precise, military kind-of, information on the overall surface and population number:

9200 □ (square)<sup>2</sup> miles, 17,690.000 inhabitants.

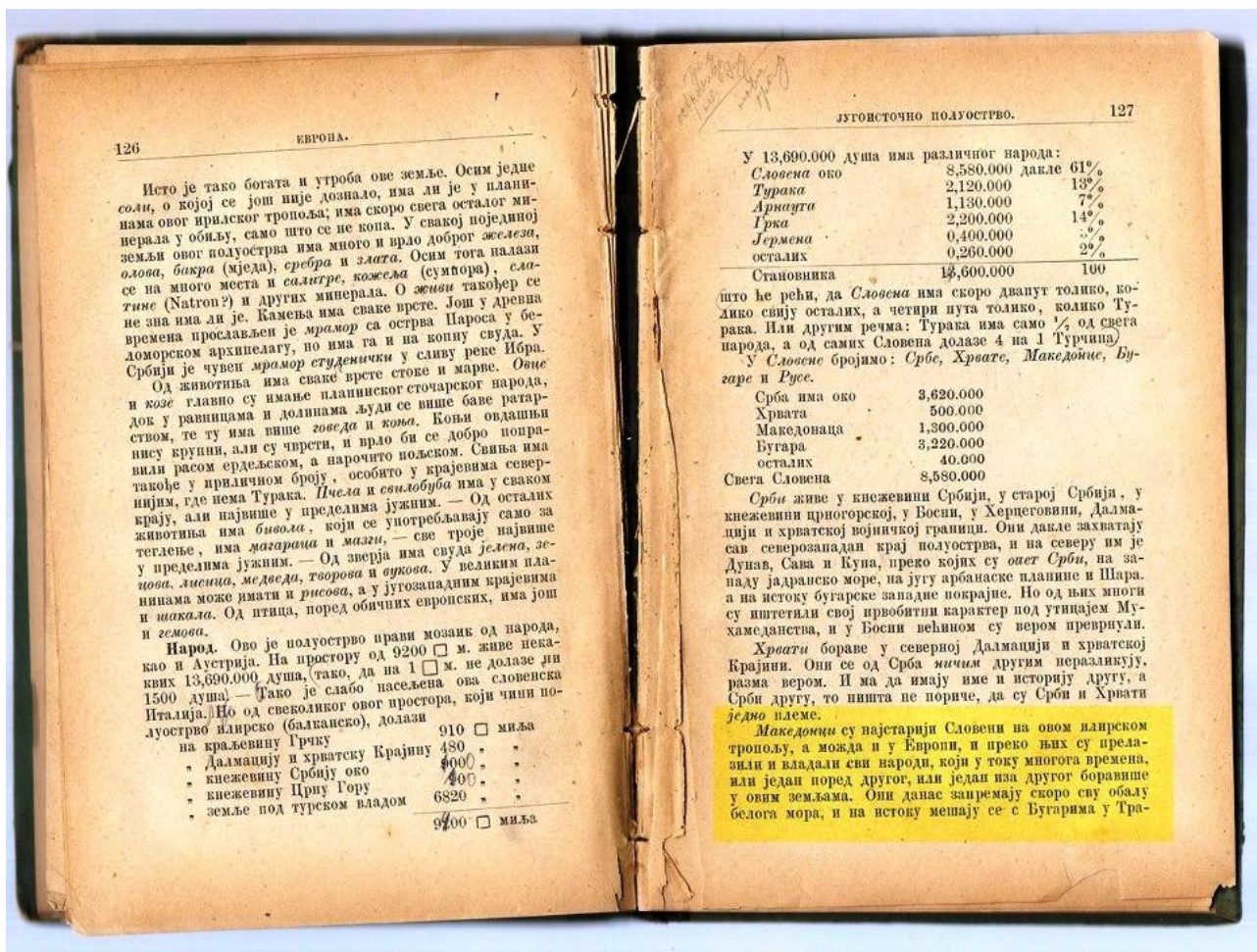
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<sup>2</sup> Dragašević uses "□" for "square".



On the page 114 (highlighted with yellow) we read: „Autochthonous natives in these countries in ancient times were some Slavic people, of which the name is not known; perhaps along the ages shuffled a lot, these are today's Macedonians. But as everywhere in the world happens that the new settlers overrule the old natives, the same occurred here too, consistently and across all the ages. And alternately different nations reached notable cultural heights or even ruling ability.”

Further (on the same page) Dragašević gives us a short account of the Macedonian history through the ancient times, he notes the reign of Philip II and Alexander III of Macedon: „Alexander the Great, founder of the Macedonian world empire, brought (his empire) until the borders of India.“ And after the Roman invasion during the Middle Ages: „150 B.C.E whole this land was taken under the rule of Latins. (...) Between the rulers of this empire most prominent were Constantine the Great (who choose the Constantinople for his capital city), born Slavic from Niš, Justinian (Petar Upravda, son of Istok), Slavic too, from the vilage of Taor near Skopje...”



(Page 127) „Macedonians are the oldest Slovans on this illyrian troad, and maybe in Europe too, and over them were passing and ruled all nations, which during long time, or one beside the other, or one after the other, stayed in these lands. Today they occupy almost the entire coast of the White (Aegean) Sea and to the East they mingle with Bulgars in Thrace,“

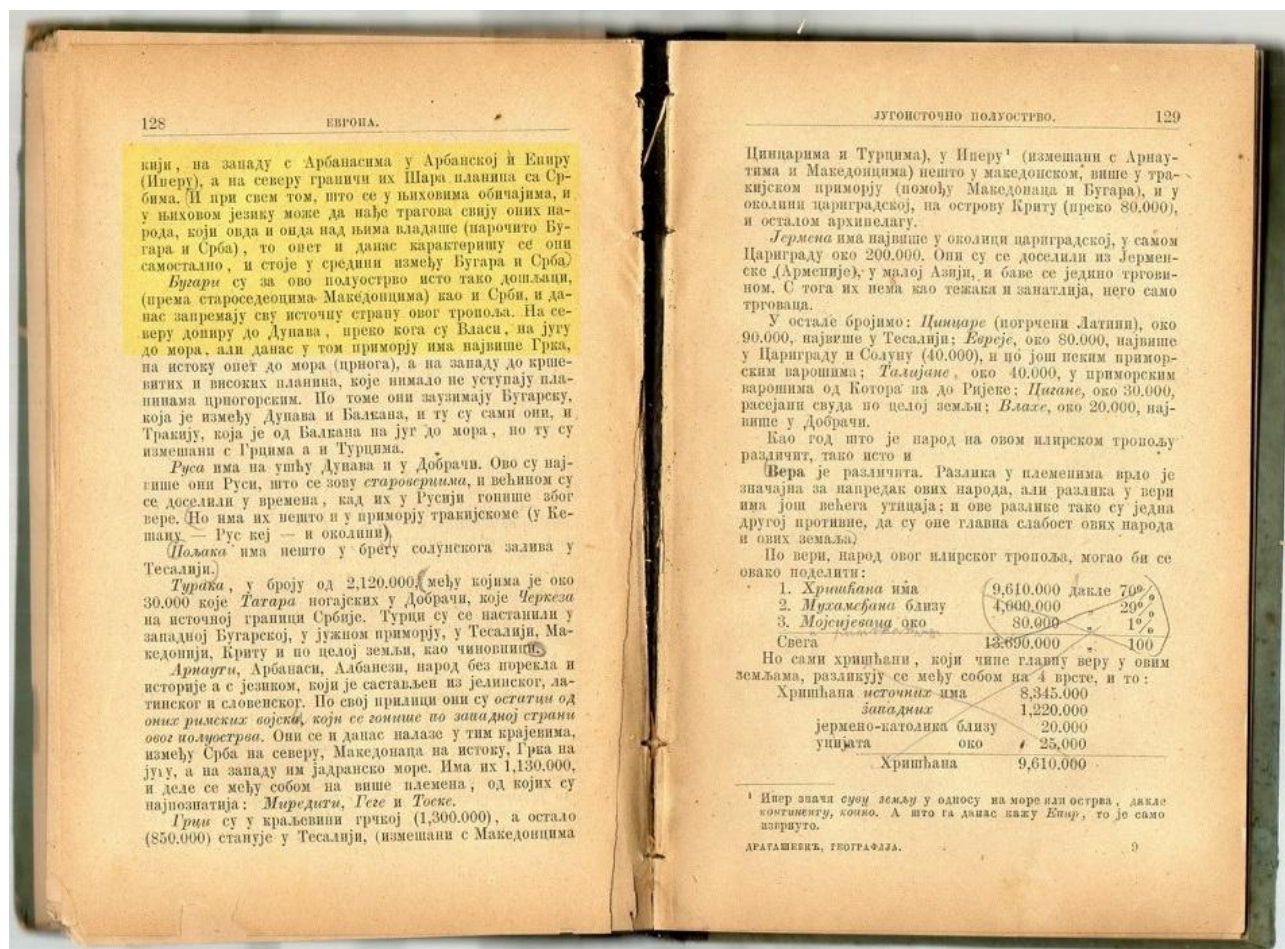
(Page 128) „...on the west with Arbanases in Arbania and Epirus (Iper), and to the north Shara Mountain borders them with Serbians. And despite all of this, even if in their customs and if in their language we can find traces of all those nations that passed here and there, that ruled over them (especially Bulgars and Serbs), they still even today are characterized by their distinctiveness, and they stay in the midway between Bulgaria and Serbia. Bulgars are also newcomers on this peninsula (comparing to indigenous Macedonians) same as Serbs, and today they occupy the eastern side of this Troad...“

On these two pages (128/129) Dragašević lists all the different (ethnic and non) groups of people on the Balkans (Arnauts, Russians, Poles, Italians, Gypsies, etc.), and on page 129 gives the religious community statistics too.

(Page 128/129) „Greeks are in the kingdom of Greece (1,300.000), and the rest (850.000) live in Thessaly (mixed with Macedonians, Vlachs and Turks) in the Iper<sup>3</sup> (mixed with Arnauts and

<sup>3</sup> „Iper [Ipper] means 'dry land' as opposite to sea and icelands, i.e. continent, land mass. And today's 'Epirus', that's just inverted.“ - Dragašević footnote. GEOGRAPHY, page 129. Other examples: Permafrost – 'frozen soil'; Periphery [Perisphere] – 'land outer limits'; Peripatetic – 'land-traveler'.

Macedonians), few on Macedonian and some more in Thracian coast (thanks to Macedonians and Bulgars), and around Constantinople, on iceland of Crete (80.000), and the rest of archipelago.“



On religious statistics for 1871 we read:

1. Christians 9,610.000 around 70%
2. Muhamedans 4,600.000 ---/--- 29%
3. Jews 80.000 ---/--- 1%

And the Christians alone are divided between them into:

1. Eastern Christians 8,345.000
2. Western -----/----- 1,220.000
3. Armenian chatolics 20.000
4. Uniat -----/----- 25.000

### 3. Renegotiation of the history – the 1878 Berlin Congress

All this facts, history, and popular traditions of the people of the Macedonian Peninsula were intentionally ignored and put under the carpet after the Congress of Berlin (13 June – 13 July 1878). It was a catastrophic meeting of the representatives of the 6 great powers of the time (Russia, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary, Italy and Germany), the defeated Ottoman Empire, and 4 brand new Balkan states (Greece, Serbia, Romania and Montenegro). It aimed at determining the new territories of the states in the Macedonian Peninsula following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 which came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Berlin.

Regardless of the geographic, ethnic or historical background, the great powers imposed their spheres of interest by force, thus creating an unprecedented mismanagement of the natural and ethnic borders, cutting through people, mountain ranges, dividing the rivers in two, and with this creating the everlasting premises for future wars and today “proxy wars”. The Congress of Berlin constituted a harsh blow to Russian Pan-Slavism. The new states of the Macedonian Peninsula had seen that banding together as “*Slavs*” benefited them less than playing to the desires and ever growing appetites of the great powers. That damaged the unity of the Macedonic populations and encouraged competition between the fledgling new puppet states. The newly created tensions of the region would continue to simmer for the next 2 centuries, and as we can see even today these artificial tensions, created with the new artificial and unnatural boundaries and “nations”, never seized to foment new conflicts, again and again...

Congress of Berlin is considered and still remains a dismal failure for the whole humanity. The dissatisfaction caused by this 'adventure' of the great powers has reached the gravest proportions, and it further prompted even stronger conservative appetites which animated the future events. The sole triumph was of the malevolence by the bloodthirsty great powers, which sowed their seeds of further conflicts, including the Balkan Wars and (ultimately) the 1st World War.

## 4. Biography

Jovan Dragašević (1836-1915) was born in Požarevac, then *Pashaluk*<sup>4</sup> of *Serbistan* in the Ottoman empire, and was a military-geographer, officer and writer, as well as renowned Professor of the Serbian Military Academia. After he finished high school in Belgrade, in 1855 he entered the Artillery School, which he finished in 1860, when he was commissioned as artillery 2nd lieutenant. As 1st lieutenant, he was a geography and military history professor in the Military Academy. Under the influence of the activities of the Society of Serbian Letters (predecessor of the Serbian Royal Academy of Sciences, whose member he was to become later) he was given the task of collecting the archive material and writing the national history. In 1865 he submitted a report and made a plan on how to organize the military history research work in Serbia. During the Serbian-Turkish war for independence (1876-1877), he served at the Supreme Headquarters as a chief of the main General Staff.

As a military expert, he was in the delegation of Serbia at the Berlin Congress in 1878. It was there that he loses his genuine immaculate qualities as a scientist and man of honor, and becomes just another politically biased and corrupted puppet in the service of great powers. However, these schismatic obscure pages from the curriculum of Jovan Dragašević are never mentioned in the pages or publications of the Serbian Ministry of Defense, nor in any other sources. The "Geography for the Middle Schools" from 1871 remains probably the only proof of his once great personality and clear mind, before it went processed and abused by the foreign interests.

Jovan Dragašević later on also passed the exam for General Staff officer, and in 1880 was promoted to the rank of colonel. He retired in 1888, when he was made honorary general.

He wrote *Principles of Military Geography*, *Military Stylistics 1 and 2*, *Military Responsibility*, *Kosmometry*, *Chronography*, *Soldier on the Marsh*, *Ethnographic Map of Serbian Countries*, and numerous other works. One of his most illustrious works is the „*Illyrian Troad: Balkan peninsula. Military-Political Study*“. Between 1864 and 1870 he is the editor of "Vojin," the first military journal on Macedonian Peninsula. He is also a Serbian representative on the International Geographic Conference in 1875. Dragašević is considered a founder of the Serbian military terminology, and one of the first Serbian officers that dealt with means of science. He was also known as a military writer, literarian, editor of the first military journal "Voin" ("Warrior" in plain Macedonian)<sup>5</sup>, than the editor of the journals "Ratnik" ("Warrior" in new Serbian terminology) and "Dardanija" and a contributor to several magazines. He wrote more than 20 books with topics based on geography, history, stylistics, as well as volumes of poetry, books on travel, dramas etc. He was awarded the Order of the Takovo Cross of the 2nd, 3rd and 5th degree, the Order of Saint Sava of the 2nd and 3rd degree, Memorials for the 1876-1878 wars and for the war in 1885 etc. He died in 1915 in Niš.

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<sup>4</sup> *Principality* in Turkish.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.makedonski.info/search/voin>

Jovan Dragasevic



Ilirsko Tropolje:  
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